

Segment 1B – Overview of The Iowa Professional Development Model continued

In this part of Bev Showers' overview of the Model, she introduces the planning components: data collection/analysis, goal setting, selecting content, and designing the process for staff development.

The main point that needs to be made is look at the data you have—that is number one. At the school and district levels we often collect data that never get examined. All kinds of records are kept, collected at the school and the principal's office, forwarded to the district office and, basically, archived. I mean no one ever looks at them again.

So the first lesson we were trying to get across in that first step is look at what you have. Yes, we are all a little bit obsessed by ITBS and ITED scores at the moment, because again there are these external pressures to conform to state and national legislation. But I am saying, yes, look at that data. We can all get a lot better at doing that. And then take a deep breath and look at what else you have got and what you can learn from it. Please take a look at what you have got and before you decide to collect more data. Then if you decide there are more things you need to know about your students, then that is the time to make the decision: let's collect more information. But the purpose of that first step is not to think of every possible kind of data we can collect and let's go get it all. Don't bury yourself with data you do not need.

Major point number two in the data area: It is critical that it be at the school level. Please let me explain that. We were trying to communicate that in the first seminar. We were saying everyone needs to be familiar with the data; the teachers at the school need to be familiar with the data. You are not doing anyone a huge favor if someone says, Here, I will take it and analyze it; these numbers are kind of scary, and I will bring you the summary. Why is it so critical that the people who are actually going to make a difference—the teachers in the classroom as they meet the students. I mean all the most beautiful planning in the world—nothing happens in the classroom. You didn't make it. So why is it critical for teachers to have this experience, right at the school level? It is going through data that builds the organization's cohesion and focus. So if I hand you a summary sheet and say, Now look here, we have to make a decision about staff development to make this all better. It doesn't have much impact. But if I am generating questions at a school site and say, Well let's look at how our students are doing here? How does that relate to this? Is that for all of our students? Well let's look at our subgroups? What starts happening is this driving feeling of shared purpose. Oh my goodness, look at this! We have kids who don't have a cl... Oh no! What are we going to do? We had better do something about this! And it is that shared experience of analyzing data, driving it with your own questions that generates "we" feeling at the organizational level. What are WE going to do about this. So that was the other point I wanted to make about the data, about this whole process from the school and district level. You are not really doing people a big favor by saying, Don't worry, I will analyze it and then I will bring it to you. It is a short cut that will cost you dearly.

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Goal Setting and Student Learning

In the goal setting and student learning part, I am going to talk to you about this in two ways. Since we met in Seminar 1, the State of Iowa has adopted “accountability agreements” with the federal government on the No Child Left Behind components of the Iowa plan. We already know the state has a trajectory and that in the year 2014 having all students proficient in reading math and science. We knew that was coming when we had the first seminar. Now it’s finalized. That’s negotiated and signed off by the federal government, and your plan for accountability is approved for the State of Iowa. One effect of that is that as you look at this from the school and district perspective, one kind of goal is set for you. You are saying this many students must be there by this year, or a year from now. That goal is kind of set. And I am not cursing the darkness around this. What is done is done. Step back from this in terms of staff development model. And if your school trajectory says your students must be 3 percent more efficient by next year. I am just taking a hypothetical. You are not looking for staff development that will increase your students’ learning by 3 percent. Okay? There is no penalty for meeting your objectives early. I just want to be clear about that. *[Laughter from listeners.]* What you are looking for is the most powerful staff development you can find, because this is a two-tiered process. Yes, we have to have all our students at a certain level, but we also must have all our sub-groups moving up. So you are looking for the most powerful intervention that you can find. If you lift the boat 15 percent, no one is going to punish you for that. But if you see that you really affected two of your subgroups, but you didn’t affect one, and we are looking at the next powerful intervention that can grab more of the kids than the first one so it enable you to have time to back and fill. Is that comprehensible—what I just said? In terms of the legal plan that the State negotiated with the federal government, you may have to do 3 percent more of your students by the year after next. That may be it. We all want everyone to meet that. But think bigger when you are in your staff development mode and setting goals and saying, This particular intervention seems to have a good track record for kids of all kinds of characteristics; we think we can get 10, 12 percent growth. Let’s go for the big bucks, but if it didn’t effect a specific subgroup, then let’s go back and address that more specifically and you have time then to do it, because you have gotten yourself breathing room. We are really urging the school and district people to think like that. Don’t aim at that goal; aim above it, and that gives you time to fill in anywhere it didn’t work across the board.

Selecting Content

In terms of content, my suspicion is this is one of the places where technical assistance is most needed. In the last couple of days I really had the sense that when we asked what evidence are you looking at when you make a decision about this content? We are thinking of evidence in terms of how the federal government defined it in No Child Left Behind meaning there was fairly rigorous research, there were control groups in place, there was some kind of a match control. It’s fairly rare to find random assignment of teachers and students for treatment of conditions. That is fairly rare. But match controls, consistent measures done impartially where there was a fairly clear benefit in doing one thing compared to another—that is what I am thinking of as evidence. In the past few

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days, [when] I've heard from school people, I say, What is the evidence base under that? When I ask you that, it is not a test. It is an honest question. I told you before there is more out there to learn than there is time for any of us to learn. That is just the state of the field. So please do not think I am more knowledgeable about the research base on every possible innovation in the world. I struggle to keep up in reading. I never go to a group like this where someone doesn't come up and say, Well, are you aware of X—some kind of treatment—and I have to say No tell me about it, and I live my whole life being behind and trying to catch up. So when I say to you, What is the evidentiary base underlying the innovation this school team is considering, or this district, please be patient with me. I want to know. We will be addressing this as one of our main agenda items for these two days is to say, how do you find out what the evidence is underlying the things you think might match up, and how do you find out if you don't know. And how do you judge the quality of that research? So that is part of the content we will be dealing with. I want to introduce a term used by Carl Glickman. And those of you who were at the reading conference heard Emily Calhoun use this, too, but he has a term he calls “cardiac data.” Have you heard this before? Cardiac data means I know in my heart this works. And what I am just saying is that cardiac data just doesn't meet the requirements [*laughter from listeners*]. I am so sorry. We can't turn that in in our plans. I am not saying it's not true, but I am saying it doesn't meet the criteria that have been laid out and negotiated for agreement.

Designing the Process for Professional Development

I find this is not a difficult concept. We are going to spend a fair amount of time on that. We don't have any trouble convincing schools and districts that this is the kind of design needed if teachers are going to have a decent opportunity to learn new content. The issue at schools and districts becomes time. Yes, we would be willing to do more thorough training and have repeated opportunities to learn something in between the times we are practicing. But when on earth are we going to that? We don't have any time allocated for this. So one of the things we are going to deal with specifically at the district and school levels during these two days is time—finding time. You have an overcrowded schedule already, and we are just going to try to think very creatively together: What are some possible reallocations of time, reordering of priorities, that would give us the time to do this decently? We can't set high goals for student learning and not give teachers learning opportunities and time to work together in a collaborative fashion in order for people to do it and still hold people accountable. So that time thing must be addressed at the school and district level.